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## Japan's Indo-Pacific Strategy as a Means of Containing China

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes Japan's policy in the basin of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The term "Indo-Pacific Region" is more often used in scientific circles and mass media now instead of Asia-Pacific Region, which reflects the radical economic and political shifts in the basin of the two oceans. The Indo-Pacific strategy of Premier of Japan Shinzo Abe has an aim to contain the growing economic and military might of China – the main geopolitical rival of Japan in Asia. However, the implementation of this strategy faces difficulties.

**Keywords:** *Asia-Pacific Region, Indo-Pacific Region, Japan, China, India, U.S.A., ASEAN, Shinzo Abe, One Belt One Road, sea expansion, security.*

Recently, scientific and journalistic publications, as well as mass media of Japan and other countries have been using the term "Indo-Pacific Region" more often than the habitual Asia-Pacific Region. Moreover, one can come across such a geographical neologism as "Indo-Pacific Ocean." This change reflects the fact that after the end of the Cold War tectonic shifts have been taking place in the economic depth of Asia – this most important region of the world. And this is accompanied with the radical breakup of the regional geopolitical landscape. It can be seen, among other things, in the change of balance of mutual relations between the leading Asian powers – China, Japan, and India.

In his article "A New Order for the Indo-Pacific," the Indian political analyst Brahma Chellaney writes, for example, that the dynamic of security in the Indo-Pacific Region is rapidly changing. The region is the place not only for the most rapidly developing economies in the world, but also for the rapidly growing military expenditures and the military naval potential, harsh rivalry for natural resources and the most dangerous strategic hot spots. It can well be said that the region is a key to global security.

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The ever wider use of the term “Indo-Pacific”, related to all countries bordering on the Indian and Pacific oceans, but not Asia-Pacific emphasizes the naval dimension of today’s tension. The oceans of Asia often become the arena of struggle for resources and influence. It seems possible that future regional crises will be provoked and/or resolved at sea.<sup>1</sup>

In Chellaney’s view, the main driving force of these changes is China, which has been trying for the past five years to put forward its frontiers far into the international waters by creating artificial islands in the South China Sea. After the militarization of these vanguard posts, which was presented to the world as the *fait accompli*, China has switched over now to the Indian Ocean. According to Indian analyst, during the past five years, China has changed the strategic landscape of the region. If other countries don’t enter into a struggle against new challenges to the territorial and naval *status quo*, the following five years may finalize the strategic successes of China.

B. Chellaney believes that Indo-Pacific powers should take more resolute measures to strengthen regional stability, reaffirming their adherence to the common standards, not speaking of international law and creating stable institutions. For a start, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States should make progress in and institutionalize their four-party dialogue on security problems for better coordination of their policies and continuation of their broader cooperation with other important actors, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and South Korea, as well as with smaller countries.

Other political analysts also suppose that behind the mentioned terminological changes stands the geographic expansion of the sphere of rivalry between world powers in connection with the “rising China.” In this process China’s main instrument is its Chairman Xi Jinping’s initiative One Belt One Road. The well-known expert on Asia, Pepe Escobar writes on this subject that in the context of the new big game in Eurasia, the New Silk Road known as the One Belt One Road initiative combines all instruments of the Chinese national might – political, economic, diplomatic, financial, intellectual, and cultural – for the formation of the geopolitical order of the 21st century. One Belt One Road is an organizational concept of China’s foreign policy in the foreseeable future, the center of what was conceptualized as “peaceful rise of China” even before Chairman Xi Jinping came to power.<sup>2</sup>

Inasmuch as one of the main participants in the rivalry of world powers in the Pacific and Indian oceans basin is the United States, experts’ attention is drawn to Washington’s attitude toward the changes taking place now and the role in them of the U.S.A. For one, P. Escobar notes that the reaction of Trump administration to the One Belt One Road initiative was rather restrained. In his words, this reaction is a “terminological transition” from what was previously called Asia-Pacific Region to Indo-Pacific Region. P. Escobar recalls that the Obama administration, right up to the former President’s visit to Asia in September 2016, always referred to the Asia-Pacific Region. And the Indo-Pacific Region includes

South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Thus, from the American point of view, this presupposes raising the status of India to the level of a growing global super-power capable to contain China.

P. Escobar cites the former U.S. Secretary of State R. Tillerson who said that the center of gravity in the world was shifting to the very heart of the Indo-Pacific Ocean. The United States and India with the common aims of peace, security, freedom of navigation, free and open architecture should serve as the eastern and western lighthouses of the Indo-Pacific Region: “the left and right beacon lights” between which the region may reach its greatest and best potential.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the concept of the Indo-Pacific Region is not so new. As Kotani Tetsuo, senior research associate of the Japanese Institute of International Relations, wrote in his article “Can the ‘Indo-Pacific’ compete with China?” the old but new geographical term Indo-Pacific Region is now used ever more often instead of Asia-Pacific Region.<sup>4</sup> It is said in the article that the U.S. Pacific Command has worked out this geopolitical concept during the Cold War. After Britain withdrew its forces from countries to the East of the Suez Canal in the late 1960s, the Soviet Union extended its military presence and influence in the entire region of the Indian Ocean. In order to oppose the growing Soviet threat in the region, as Kotani asserts, the U.S. Pacific Command in 1972 decided to carry on its activity in the Pacific and Indian oceans. From the 1970s, the U.S. Pacific Command regarded the two great oceans as a strategic theater and called it “Indo-Asia-Pacific.”

According to the Japanese expert, the Trump administration also adopted the secret Indo-Pacific strategy, which is believed to correspond to its strategy of national security. The expert assumes that the secret document calls for strategy of rivalry with regard to China in the Indo-Pacific Region. “Are other countries of the region – Japan, India, Australia, ASEAN members, and South Korea – ready to enter into rivalry with China?” Kotani asks. Japan’s Indo-Pacific strategy is mostly like that of the United States, and this is why Tokyo should persuade Washington to realize this strategy in such a way, which could be acceptable to other countries of the region, concludes Tetsuo Kotani.

In actual fact, the term Indo-Pacific Region is widely used by the United States after Donald Trump came to power. According to the electronic newspaper *Asia Times*, this is the new American name for Asia aimed at China. During President Trump’s trip to Asia in November 2017, the White House repeatedly used this term and not once mentioned the Asia-Pacific Region. In the view of this newspaper, this pun should emphasize the role of India in the U.S. strategic rivalry with China. The *Asia Times* points out that a hint at the Indian Ocean and the use of India as a pillar in the attempt “to contain” China accord well with the Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe’s promotion of his Indo-Pacific strategy. Abe wishes to draw the United States, India, and, possibly, Australia to his defensive structure in order to contain China.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, after Shinzo Abe came to power, Tokyo began to view the Indo-Pacific Region as a geostrategic concept of the 21st century. His strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region goes back to his first term of office as the prime minister. Initially, it was mentioned in his speech titled *The Merger of Two Oceans* at India's parliament in August 2007. At the time the Japanese Premier advocated the idea that Japan and India as "two similarly thinking democratic naval powers" should contribute to freedom and prosperity in a "greater Asia." This, in Abe's view, includes the United States, Australia, and other Pacific countries, turning into a huge network, which would allow people, commodities, and capital to move quite freely.

Having come to power for the second time in 2012, Shinzo Abe developed his Indo-Pacific concept. First, he announced his Strategy of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region at the 6th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), which took place in Kenya on August 27-28, 2016. He said, among other things, at the time that Japan sees dynamism and synergy between the two continents – Asia and Africa, which is full of potentials, and the two free and open seas – the Pacific and Indian oceans – to be the key to stability and flourishing of the international community. Viewing these continents and seas as an integrated region, Japan intends to open a new area of activity for Japanese diplomacy. This strategy is based on a logical conclusion of the government that free and open seas are the sources of peace and prosperity in the world."<sup>6</sup>

In his speech Japan's Prime Minister emphasized that for the implementation of this strategy Japan intends to further strengthen its strategic cooperation with such countries as India, which has long-standing relations with East Africa, and also with the United States and Australia, which are its allies. For one, during the Indian Premier's visit to Japan in November 2016, both leaders agreed to assume the initiative themselves for ensuring stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region by strengthening synergy between the strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Ocean of Japan and India's policy of "acting in the East" by cooperation."<sup>7</sup>

Here is what the Foreign Minister of Japan Taro Kono said about Japan's strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region in his speech about Japan's foreign policy at the 196th session of the country's parliament on January 22, 2018. "The free and open naval order based on the supremacy of law is the cornerstone of stability and prosperity of the international community. The Indo-Pacific Region stretching from the Asia-Pacific Region across the Indian Ocean to the Middle East and Africa is the nucleus of global development, which is inhabited by over half the world's population. I am sure that the preservation and strengthening of the free and open naval order of the Indo-Pacific Region as a 'global treasure' will bring stability and prosperity to all countries of this region."

And further: "We shall promote this strategy basing ourselves on three pillars.

- The first one is distribution and consolidation of such principles as freedom of navigation and supremacy of law.
- Second, we shall strive for economic prosperity by improving connections of the region, developing a qualitative infrastructure in accordance with world standards.
- Third, we shall ensure peace and stability by supporting the development of the naval law-abiding potential.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, to date the strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region has taken the key position in the foreign policy of Shinzo Abe. Its main focus, as Japan’s Premier holds, lies in the development of the international naval order in accordance with the supremacy of law. However, there is no secret that this strategy has been evolved as the counterbalance to the growing offensive activity of China in the South China and East China seas, although official Tokyo emphasizes the strategy is not directed against any concrete country.

The anti-Chinese background of the strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region is not concealed by the Japanese mass media. The right-wing newspaper *Sankei shimbun* writes that during President Trump’s voyage to Asia both he and Shinzo Abe promoted the strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region. Its meaning is to liberate the South China Sea from Chinese hegemony. To achieve this, it would be necessary to have the coastal countries sharing such common values as freedom and the supremacy of law to cooperate in the sphere of security. A great achievement is the fact that both Japan and the U.S.A. share this strategy with India and Australia.<sup>9</sup>

As asserted by the abovementioned Kotani, the Indo-Pacific strategy of Abe reflects his geoeconomic concept of the region. The strategy is aimed at combining dynamism of Asia and Africa and envisages a broader integration of the region along the shoreline of the Indian and Pacific oceans by way of creating a high-level infrastructure and broader and closer connectivity in the region. The strategy is also a geopolitical counterbalance to the growing Chinese influence and presence in Eurasia and Africa within the framework of the One Belt, One Road initiative. In the view of the Japanese expert, the key to Abe’s strategy should be four countries – Japan, India, Australia, and the U.S.A. – forming the so-called Democratic lozenge of security.<sup>10</sup>

One of the close assistants of Abe has said that “to find a way to coexist with China will be a great challenge to Japanese diplomacy,”<sup>11</sup> One of the ways to contain “expansionist China,” in the Premier’s view, should be a geopolitical structure consisting of four countries, which share the “common democratic values.” In the essay entitled *Democratic Lozenge of Security of Asia* written by Shinzo Abe in 2012, he asserted that Japan should try to stabilize the Pacific Region in cooperation with Australia and India, and also to rely on its traditional alliance with the United States. This concept has been implemented by Japanese diplomats in the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Fearing that President Trump bent on isolationism may revise the policy of “turning to Asia” put forward by his predecessor Barack Obama, Abe brought this strategy to the attention of the present U.S. President through diplomatic channels. He believed that the strategy from the mouth of the U.S. leader would have more weight in the international arena. Abe’s plan has been justified, and during his trip to Asia in November 2017, President Trump mentioned time and again the Indo-Pacific strategy, thus inspiring the leading officials of Japan’s Foreign Ministry. A Japanese diplomat admired the fact that it was the first time that the U.S. President fully accepted a strategy worked out by Japan.<sup>12</sup>

Similar views were expressed by the newspaper *Sankei shimbun*, which wrote that the Japanese-American alliance was going to present something unbelievable. Namely, U.S.A. adapts itself to the strategy proclaimed by Japan. Throughout the entire postwar period, Japan has been going behind the United States, however, now the situation is changing. At the same time, the newspaper fears that the phrase uttered by Trump at the APEC Summit in Danang (Vietnam) that America would always be his highest priority throws a shadow on this strategy.<sup>13</sup>

To implement its Indo-Pacific strategy, the Japanese government intends to apply economic levers. “Japan will effectively use aid which it grants to developing countries in order to promote its strategy of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region, the White Paper of the Japanese government writes on official assistance to the region for 2017.<sup>14</sup> The document emphasizes that Tokyo wishes the vast region to contribute to “international welfare,” and with this aim in view it will support developing countries in consolidating the naval legislation.

The White Paper says that within the framework of its official aid to development, Japan will also try to develop the high-quality infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific Region as an incentive to increasing the flow of people and goods. A key to stability and prosperity in the international community is dynamism, which is created by uniting Asia and Africa, as well as the Pacific and Indian oceans. In 2016, Japan granted official development aid to the total sum of \$16.8 billion, thus taking fourth place among member countries of the ECO, after the United States, Germany, and Britain.<sup>15</sup>

One of the priority directions of the realization of the Indo-Pacific strategy of Tokyo is the all-round rapprochement between Japan and India, which is going on so rapidly that one can even talk of the formation of a new Tokyo – New Delhi axle in the basin of the two oceans – Pacific and Indian. A vivid demonstration of it was a visit of Shinzo Abe to India and his negotiations with Narendra Modi in September 2017. It was the tenth meeting of the two leaders after Modi came to power in 2014. During the visit, Abe described the Japanese-Indian relations as ones “entering a new era.”

Both sides emphasized the affinity of the strategy of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region published by Abe in 2016 with the Act in the East policy proclaimed by Modi. This policy is focused on the comprehensive cooperation of

India with East Asian countries. The joint statement published on the results of the visit shows that both premiers attempted to unite their foreign policy views. As analysts in the two countries claim, Japan and India were prompted to closer cooperation by the desire to contain the sea and economic expansion of China.

Foreign analysts also maintain that at present Beijing pursues a naval strategy termed by them a “pearl necklace.” According to it, China helps develop ports to such countries as Pakistan and Sri Lanka as its bases, which actually encircle India. Chinese warships and submarines regularly drop anchor there. In the summer of 2017, Chinese warships began to operate on the base created by China in Jibuti (East Africa). It became China’s first military base abroad, which, as Japanese military experts believe, alarmed India.

Japan, which also opposes China in the East China Sea is also worried by Chinese naval operations in the Indian Ocean. Sea routes pass through the ocean along which Japan receives a lion’s share of hydrocarbon resources. Moreover, it depends one hundred percent from their import. In the Joint Statement, Abe and Modi agreed that the interests of Japan and India largely depend on stronger cooperation in the sphere of security at sea. Taking into consideration China’s naval expansion, the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the U.S. and Indian Naval Forces held joint naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal (Indian Ocean) in July 2017. At present, Tokyo and New Delhi hold negotiations on the purchase by India of military amphibians of Japanese make. It is indicative that Abe’s visit took place several days after New Delhi and Beijing have agreed to stop the longest and serious military confrontation along the disputed joint border.

The Chinese factor largely determines the coincidence of the economic interests of Japan and India. At present, the center of rivalry between New Delhi and Beijing is the Chinese initiative One Belt One Road. It envisages the creation of overland and maritime transportation corridors connecting China with Africa, which will form an enormous sphere of Chinese economic influence on the Eurasian-African area. The central link of the overland part of the initiative is supposed to be the state of Kashmir, sovereignty over which is disputed by India and Pakistan. For its part, Japan had a negative attitude to the One Belt One Road initiative, however, some time later, with a view to improving relations with China, it demonstrated a certain desire to participate in the initiative. True, so far no concrete projects have been put forward.

In contrast to the Chinese spectacular project, Abe and Modi during their meeting agreed to cooperate in order to improve ties in the greater Indo-Pacific Region. For this purpose Tokyo and New Delhi intend to work on creating a vast transportation infrastructure. Japan would also like to develop ports jointly with India, and create special economic zones in Myanmar, Africa, and other regions. For its part, India would wish to get Japan’s aid in opening an economic corridor connecting India, Iran, and Afghanistan.

It is evident that the Asian-African corridor planned by Japan and India, whose cost, according to some estimates, may reach \$40 billion, is directly

opposed to China's One Belt One Road project. It is regarded as a modern Silk Road, which at one time connected overland and maritime China with Europe and Africa via Asia and the Middle East.

Speaking at a conference organized by Japan, EU, and UN and devoted to the development of the infrastructure favorable for the environment in New York, in September 2017, the Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono disclosed Japan's intention to become the leader in creating a good-quality infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific Region. The main aspect of the bilateral economic cooperation of Japan and India will be the construction in the region of speed railway lines with Japanese technology at the cost of \$17 billion. Tokyo can also gain an opportunity to build other, similar railway lines, which are planned by India in order to outpace China, which is also going to engage in this work.

India welcomed the proposal to increase Japan's investments in infrastructural projects in its far-off northeastern districts, which India views as its gates to Southeast Asia. In the course of Abe's visit, an agreement was reached that Japan would grant India soft loans to a total sum of 190 billion yen for the construction of the railway mentioned and other infrastructural projects. In accordance with the Japanese-Indian agreement on cooperation in the sphere of peaceful nuclear energy, which went into force in July 2017, the two countries will speed up negotiations on the export of technologies of Japanese nuclear power plants to India.

Japanese analysts note that India occupies a huge territory and has a population of 1.3 billion and, according to forecasts, will even outstrip the most populous country in the world – China. This will obviously increase the role of India in the Indo-Pacific Region, and the forming military economic tandem of India and Japan, one of whose aims is to be an opponent to China. However, a brake on the road to creating a firm Japanese-Indian tandem may be their dependence on China in the trade-economic sphere. Not one of them could run the risk of direct confrontation with the biggest economy of the region. Moreover, both of them have certain plans of economic cooperation with China.

Japan is not a member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) headed by China, but displays interest in the One Belt, One Road initiative. On the contrary, India refuses to take part in this initiative, but joined the AIIB. China, too, is one of the biggest trade partners of both countries. This is why Tokyo emphasizes, at least in words, that its Indo-Pacific strategy is not intended for containing China.

It is also evident that in accordance with its nonaligned policy, New Delhi will hardly allow Tokyo or Washington use India like an anti-Chinese card. And India will prefer to settle the existing contradictions with China on the bilateral basis. As a buffer softening contradictions between China and India such international set-ups like BRICS and SCO can be used.

The visit of Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Kono to Brunei and Singapore in February 2018, showed that Tokyo gives an important place in its Indo-Pacific strategy to Southeast Asia and ASEAN countries. It is precisely in

this region that various aspects of this strategy will be tested, primarily the construction of the infrastructure and guarantee of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

Singapore and Brunei hold a priority place in the context of this strategy, although in different manifestations. Despite their small size, both these countries play a great role within the ASEAN framework. Singapore holds chairmanship in the organization in 2018, which makes it a major promoter of Tokyo's regional initiatives. Brunei has for many years fulfilled the functions of coordinator of relations between ASEAN and Japan, which will be 45 years old this year. In the course of Kono's visit, apart from bilateral problems, the subject of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region was discussed on Japan's initiative.

Kono's words on board the Japanese destroyer *Yamagiri* were worth remembering. The minister emphasized that Japan promoted its strategy of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region well aware that this region should be free and open and become a cornerstone of peace and prosperity not only for Japan, but the entire world. Evidently, his words referred to the situation in the South China Sea and were addressed primarily to China.

As the senior editor of the magazine *Diplomat* Prashanth Parameswaran notes, so far the promotion by Japan of its Indo-Pacific strategy is at a earlier stage, especially in Southeast Asia. In different countries in the area there are mixed feelings concerning this strategy and the way it is going to be implemented in a broader context; and whether it will be connected with such ideas as the so-called four, including Japan, Australia, India, and the U.S.A., or with due account of the growing role of China in the region. But Kono's visit demonstrated Japan's recognition of the role and place of small countries of Southeast Asia in this broader strategy.<sup>16</sup>

Japan attaches great importance to the Republic of Maldives situated on the chain of islands near important navigation routes in the Indian Ocean in the promotion of its Indo-Pacific strategy. Under the present crisis conditions in that country, an acute struggle unfolded between India and China for economic and political domination there. The growing political instability in the Republic of Maldives threatens to turn into another flare-up of contradictions between New Delhi and Beijing, to boot, the regional giants support the conflicting sides in the fluid political situation in the country. The PRC Chairman Xi Jinping visited the Republic of Maldives in 2014, and in December 2017, a Chinese-Maldives agreement on free trade was signed in Beijing. According to the opposition Maldives Democratic party, more than 70 percent of the country's foreign debt is to China.<sup>17</sup>

Tokyo also intends to gain positions in that small country, which is situated in a strategically important place of the Indian Ocean. In early 2018, the Maldives were visited by Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono. According to the newspaper *Nihon keizai shimbun*, he and his Maldives colleague Muhammed Asem agreed to cooperate in promoting Tokyo's diplomatic strategy for the Indo-Pacific

ic Region against the background of China's growing influence. The newspaper emphasizes that the Japanese Foreign Minister has visited the country in the Indian Ocean situated close to the key shipping line economically very important to Japan, all the more so since the Japanese Premier has never been to it. After the meeting in the country's capital Male, Kono told journalists about his and Asem's community of views on the Indo-Pacific strategy promoted by the Japanese Premier Abe.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that in contrast to a number of other Asian countries, the administration of the South Korean President Moon Jae-in was very cautious in using and interpreting the term Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region due to the fact that it has an openly anti-Chinese connotation. As previously indicated, this term was used by the U.S. President Donald Trump during his trip to Asian countries in November 2017. For one, in a joint statement published in Seoul after his meeting with the South Korean President it was said that President Trump emphasized that alliance between the United States and South Korea based on mutual trust and common values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and supremacy of law remains the foundation of security, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific Region. However, the wording of the Joint Statement was actually belied by the economic adviser Kim Hyun-chul 15 hours later. He said during his visit to Indonesia that "Japan tries to build an Indo-Pacific line in order to create a diplomatic bunch consisting of Japan, Australia, India, and the United States, but we must not join it." Highly-placed officials of the apparatus of the President of South Korea stated that the country should study the new term of the U.S. foreign policy – "Indo-Pacific" before publicly approving it.<sup>19</sup>

Such position reflects the present rapprochement between Seoul and Beijing and its striving, at least symbolically, to distance itself from the strategy of containing China pursued by the United States and Japan. For one, South Korea has publicly announced that it will not approve the further deployment of the U.S.A. THAAD antimissile defense system, having pointed out that the country will not participate in the Antimissile Defense System (ADM) under U.S. command. Seoul has also rejected the plan of a tripartite military alliance between South Korea, the U.S.A, and Japan.<sup>20</sup>

Despite its short life, the concept of the Indo-Pacific Region has already been reflected in the Asian strategy of some European countries. In March 2018, the French naval operative group named *Jeanne d'Arc* moved to the southern part of the Pacific Ocean. It included British warships, and the voyage is supposed to take five months. The newspaper *Asia Times* asserts that both France and Britain wish to increase their naval presence in the Indo-Pacific Region. The two countries assert that their activity in the region is based on their interest in maintaining the proper order according to international law. However, the paper claims, the group headed by France will work in the countries which have contradictions with China. Indeed, Indonesia, Australia, and Vietnam doubt the just character of Beijing's claims to the South China Sea, although with different

degree of intensity and due to different reasons. Singapore does not claim the disputed district, however, it consolidates security partnership with the United States and India, which side with Southeast Asian countries disputing China's territorial claims.

The growing naval presence of France and Britain in the Indian and Pacific oceans, in the newspaper's view, reflects their desire to help the U.S.A. to keep China under control. In this respect, the promising alliance between the U.S.A., India, Japan, and Australia hammered together with a view to oppose China's military expansion in the Indo-Pacific Region, can be joined by France and Britain, and the sphere of its activity can expand from the Red Sea and East Africa to the Pacific Region. This will be a definite challenge to China.<sup>21</sup> Evidently, the naval mission of France and Britain will cause a negative reaction of Beijing, inasmuch as it will not accept the attempts by nonregional actors to interfere in the situation in a geopolitical area regarded by it as its sphere of influence.

With Beijing's growing influence in the international arena and a relative reduction of the U.S. presence in it after Donald Trump came to power, the Japanese Indo-Pacific strategy assigns greater role, along with India, to Australia and also to France and Britain. As noted by the newspaper *Nihon keizai shimbun*, the U.S. ally Australia with its Pacific and Indian oceans coasts has a decisive influence on the successful implementation of this strategy.<sup>22</sup> The present Premier of Australia Malcolm Turnbull, unlike his predecessor Tony Abbott, has taken a course to certain distancing from China. However, this course has certain limits, inasmuch as China is the biggest trade partner of Australia, judging by almost 30% of its export. Malcolm Turnbull has other reasons, too, to strengthen ties with Japan. Apart from the fact that both these countries are U.S. allies, they play an important role in the setting up of the Transpacific Partnership (TPP). Their role has grown after the United States has withdrawn from TPP.

As to Britain, its Premier Theresa May who holds the post from July 2016, is striving to establish closer ties with Japan's Premier Shinzo Abe. It can largely be explained by Britain's withdrawal from the European Union in March 2019, and to soften the consequences of Brexit Britain intends to shift its diplomatic focus to the Asia-Pacific Region. In this context, T. May visited Japan in August 2017. Her visit was the first state visit of the British premier for the past five years. She was present at a meeting of Japan's National Security Council and agreed with Premier Abe to broaden cooperation in the sphere of security.

The two countries actively cooperate in the area of military technologies. Britain is the second country (after the U.S.A.) jointly working on offensive weapons with Japan. A highly-placed official of Britain's Foreign Office called Japan "the most important partner of his country in the sphere of security in Asia." The British government also favors support to the Indo-Pacific strategy of Shinzo Abe. A British government spokesman does not exclude the possibility of Britain joining the TPP in the future.

At the same time, London does not intend to oppose Japan to China in its foreign-policy strategy; China's role in Asia, just as in the entire world, is steadily growing. In view of certain ambiguity of Britain's position after Brexit the country is forced to maintain constructive relations with Japan and China.

As noted earlier, France also wishes to increase its military presence in the Indo-Pacific Region, which will, definitely, be approved by Tokyo. This is confirmed by the visit of the French President Emmanuel Macron to India in March 2018. According to the newspaper *Nihon keizai shimbun*, against the background of China's growing activities in the region, both India and France decided to increase their cooperation in the sphere of defense in the Indian Ocean and signed a pact ensuring mutual access to the military bases of each other. The Indo-Pacific Region has a great significance for the two countries. India has a shoreline stretching for 7,500 kilometers, more than 1,380 islands, and an exclusive economic zone with an area of two million square kilometers. The French territories in the Indo-Pacific Region are inhabited by 1.6 million people, and its exclusive economic zone is 9.1 million square kilometers.<sup>23</sup>

Judging by all these circumstances, the strategy of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region promoted by the Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe becomes a pivot of the foreign-policy activity of Japan, as well as its security policy for the foreseeable future. This strategy has emerged largely due to the contradictions between the old Asian power – Japan and the rising China. Despite statements by Japanese officials denying the essence of this strategy, it reflects the desire to contain the growing military might and economic influence of China in the region. With due account of the growing economic influence of the ASEAN countries in the region, and the fact that the United States, India, and leading European countries also have their interests in the basin of the two great oceans, the balance of their forces will be determined in the entire international arena.

However, the implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategy of Tokyo, which is now going through the stage of conceptual foundation, is far from simple. Because many countries, including the future main rival of China in the region – India, on which Japan relies in its plan to create an informal coalition opposing China, have their own economic and political goals with regard to the PRC, and are not going to sacrifice their interests for the sake of Japan.

Evidently, these countries will try to balance and find the golden mean in their relations with Japan and China – the leading Asian and world powers. Tokyo well understands this. There is no doubt that parallel to its strategy of containing China, Japan will strive to improve relations with it not only as a potential foe and the main threat in the sphere of security, but also as the most important trade and economic partner.

One can agree with the American expert James E. Auer who writes that he doubts that Abe awaits the formal four-party or Indo-Pacific alliance will emerge in the nearest future. The four states of "Abe's strategic lozenge" wish good relations with China, where Xi Jinping desires to maintain order in his rising coun-

try with serious economic and demographic problems and a system of values quite different from other such systems.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the analyst believes that the strategy aimed at creating the free and open Indo-Pacific Region will find decisive support on the part of the governments and public of Japan, the United States, Australia, India, and ASEAN countries. The Indo-Pacific Region, he thinks, needs a leader in order to turn the concept into an effective strategy. In his view, such leader should be Japan. The next few years will show whether this prophecy of the US expert comes true.

NOTES:

1. Brahma Chellaney, "A New Order for the Indo-Pacific." URL: <http://www.atimes.com/article/new-order-indo-pacific/>
2. Pepe Escobar, The New Great Game moves from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific. URL: <http://www.atimes.com/article/new-great-game-moves-asia-pacific-indo-pacific/>
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